

The Four Padas of Saiva Siddhanta

This is the first in a series of articles focusing on the four padas of Saiva Siddhanta: charya (conduct), kriya (worship), yoga (meditation), and jnana (enlightenment). Each article will explore one pada, providing a clear and straightforward understanding of these key aspects. As you will see, each pada has four stages, also called charya, kriya, yoga and jnana.

Charya Pada

The practices of Saiva Siddhanta are divided into four progressive stages called padas. We begin with the charya pada which focuses on religious activities to be performed at a Siva temple. It has four stages. The first, charya in charya, consists of personal service in the temple. Specific activities listed in scripture include lighting the lamps, picking flowers, making garlands, sweeping, washing and polishing the floors, singing the Lord's praise, ringing the bell and fetching ceremonial water. Kriya in charya consists of attending the paratha puja as per the guidelines of the Agamas and, following one's guru, offering worship to the murti of any of the twenty-five forms of Śiva. The devotee may alternatively worship Ganapati or Skanda. Yoga in charya consists of meditation after the puja is complete. Jnana in charya is the experiential knowledge gained by these practices.

The charya pada is also called the dasa marga, meaning "path of servitude," for here the soul relates to God as servant to master. The attainment, of this pada is salokya "Sharing the world" of God. Tirunavukarasu Nayanar (Appar) is the Samaya Acharya who exemplifies the charya pada.

As well as describing specific activities to be performed at the temple, the charya component of charya includes guidelines for conduct. The *Tirumantiram* gives such a guideline in verse 1444, stating that adoration that displaces anger is charya worship. Sabharathnam Sivacharya elaborates on this verse. "The worship of Śiva pertaining to the charya path is to be with pure and spontaneous love which wards off anger, lust and

other such vices. This renders fitness to the devotees to do service without expecting any benefit or reward.” This can be likened to how a child is trained. Parents systematically show the child what actions are not acceptable, how the child needs to restrain his behavior. In Sanskrit the classical restraints, called yamas, are ten in number: noninjury, truthfulness, nonstealing, sexual purity, patience, steadfastness, compassion, honesty, moderate appetite and purity.

Kriya in charya is ideally practiced by attending a temple once a week or even more frequently. When there is no temple close by, then at least the major festivals should be attended. Another way of attending temples is to go on a pilgrimage, a tirthayatra, in which many temples are visited over a period of one or more weeks. A deeper experience of the Deity is possible on pilgrimage because the devotee is worshipping multiple times a day for many days in a row. *Tirumantiram* verse 1445 explains the practice of pilgrimage to Siva temples: “O, devotees on the charya path! Earnestly wishing for the grace of Siva, wander through the cities, towns and the sacred and sanctified temples, holding the view that Siva is your supreme Lord, sing His glory. Having extolled His greatness, prostrate before Him and surrender yourself to Him.”

Yoga in charya is meditation performed after attending the parartha puja. Such meditations within the temple chamber will evolve as the years of sadhana pass. Gurudeva taught this initial practice: Sit in front of the Deity and pull all the life forces that we feel around our body into ourselves. Then lift those energies up the spine into the head. This is done with our mind and our breath. When we surrender to the Deity with devotion during the temple puja, we awaken the amrita. The amrita is the sweet essence that comes from the sahasrara chakra. It connects us to the Divine. The meditator enjoys the amrita that flows from the top of the head throughout his body.

Jnana is sometimes described as the intellectual knowledge we have acquired by studying scripture. My guru and his guru stressed that true jnana does not come from studying scriptures but from our superconscious intuition, from within. Gurudeva gave this description of experiencing intuition: “The first sadhana, therefore, is to always hold the overview and cling in your memory to the intuitive flashes that come as a result [of your

practices]. These intuitive flashes come from deep within and are the only thing that should be remembered, for this is your jnana, your insightfulness, your own wisdom, breaking through.”

Each pada brings deeper maturation of the soul. We can say that the jnana that develops in each “are the steps in growth, like bud, blossom, fruit and ripe fruit” (*Sivagnana Mapadiyam*). Gurudeva taught that in the charya pada or karma yoga the devotee’s focus on service in the temple and to the other devotees gradually lessens the desire to receive recognition and reward for his seva until he is truly serving for the sake of service. Gurudeva added that “It is the helping hand of our loving Ganesha who reaches down from the muladhara to lift up the aspirant.” In the charya pada, darshan of the Deity is the physical sight of the murti.

Kriya Pada

This is the second in our series of articles focusing on the four padas of Saiva Siddhanta: charya (conduct), kriya (worship), yoga (meditation), and jnana (enlightenment).

The kriya pada focuses on religious activities to be performed in the home shrine room. We will explore its four stages. Charya in kriya consists of cleaning the shrine room and collecting all the necessary substances and implements needed for the daily worship of the Sivalinga. Kriya in kriya consists in performing atmartha puja to Siva in the form of Sivalinga as prescribed in the Agamas with the preliminary five purifications, after having received initiation into that worship. Yoga in kriya consists of meditation after the atmartha puja. Jnana in kriya is the experiential knowledge gained by these practices.

The kriya pada is also called the satputra marga, meaning "true son’s way," for here the soul relates to God as a son to his parents. The patavi, attainment, of this pada is samipya “nearness” to God. Tirujnana Sambandar Nayanar is the Samaya Acharya who exemplified the kriya pada.

The focus of the kriya pada is the deepening of our love of God Siva. This idea is captured in *Tirumantiram* verse 1456: “Being wholly under the possession of love, I would stand before the Lord with a melting heart. Every day I would offer the services needed for the Lord and the devotees. Standing before the lotus feet of the Lord whose form appears to have been made of pure and high-quality gold, I would supplicate, ‘Kindly bestow Your grace on me.’ At this stage, Siva entered my body, filling it up with light up to the pores of my bones.”

Gurudeva’s explanation of kriya also gives prominence to deepening our devotion to God Siva. “Hinduism demands deep devotion through bhakti yoga in the kriya pada, softening the intellect and unfolding love. In kriya, the second stage of religiousness, our sadhana, which was mostly external in charya, is now also internal. Kriya, literally ‘action or rite,’ is a stirring of the soul in awareness of the Divine, overcoming the obstinacy of the instinctive-intellectual mind. ... We perform ritual and puja not because we have to, but because we want to. We are drawn to the temple to satisfy our longing. We sing joyfully.”

For the practice of the kriya pada to take place, it is necessary to establish a shrine in the home. Wherever possible, it should be a separate room, not in a cabinet or on a shelf. At a minimum, it should be a quiet corner of the home. All the actions of keeping the shrine room clean and preparing the altar for the puja constitute charya in kriya.

The core practice of kriya in kriya is for a family member, generally the father, to perform a daily puja in the home. In a sense, he becomes the family priest, emulating the temple priests while following a simpler, non-public liturgy known as atmartha puja. Over time the spiritual vibration generated through daily puja and other practices permeates the entire home, gradually transforming it from the family’s home into God Siva’s home.

A broader set of practices for the kriya pada is given in *Tirumantiram* verse 1496. “Performing the worship, systematic study of the scriptures, praising the Lord, repeating the mantras, observing pure and good austerities, being

truthful, free from impurities, preparing the rice offering—these and the purification of oneself are the disciplines of faultless Satputra Marga.”

Gurudeva gives a similar list. “We absorb and intuit the wisdom of the Vedas and Agamas. We perform pilgrimage and fulfill the sacraments. We practice diligently the ten classical observances called niyamas [which are remorse, contentment, giving, faith, worship of the Lord, scriptural listening, cognition, sacred vows, recitation and austerity.]”

The yoga stage of kriya brings meditation into the home shrine, awakening insights and unfolding intuitive knowings. The devotee can keep his meditative focus even in the family home. The jnana stage of kriya is parallel, bringing superconscious awakenings that flow from the power of such daily practice.

The soul grows more mature with each pada. Gurudeva taught that in the kriya pada the devotee develops a deeper and deeper love of God, to the point that he may cry with joy during the worship. When that love is steady every day, when he is ready to give up his personal will to God’s Universal Will, then he has reached the highest level of kriya.

For those in kriya, darshan is not just seeing the physical murti in the temple. It is feeling the divine presence, sannidhya, the sacred energy emanating from the murti. In moments of higher consciousness, devotees may even have a vision of the Deity, such as the subtle form of the murti moving and smiling at them, or turning into an animated, human-like figure or, with eyes closed, inwardly seeing the Deity's face as real as any living being.

Yoga Pada

This is the third in our series of articles focusing on the four padas of Saiva Siddhanta: charya (conduct), kriya (worship), yoga (meditation), and jnana (enlightenment).

The yoga pada focuses on the regular practice of meditation, detachment and austerities under the guidance of a satguru through whose grace we attain the realization of Parasiva—the highest and transcendent aspect of Siva. It has four stages. Charya in yoga consists of cleaning the area of the shrine room where one meditates, keeping it pure, and collecting all things needed for worshipping one's guru and Deities.

The charya component of yoga has two general guidelines for conduct. Rishi Tirumular gives the first in verse 1465 of his *Tirumantiram*, stating that charya in yoga deprives the seeker of desires, awakening profound dispassion. A dispassionate yogi holds the perspective that happiness does not come from outside, from people or possessions, but from the depths of one's soul.

The second guideline is to maintain equanimity, defined as mental calmness, composure and evenness of temper, especially in difficult situations. The *Sarvajnanottara Agama Yoga Pada* verse 4 gives this description: "Keeping the mind balanced well when honored or abused, and in the same way when delighted or distressed, and having completely freed himself from being subject to excessive delight, fear and despondency, the sadhaka should repeatedly practice the disciplines of yoga."

Kriya in yoga consists of offering prayers, mantras or a puja to one's guru and his lineage after beseeching the grace of the Deities. Yoga in yoga consists of asana, proper meditation posture; pranayama, regulated breathing; pratyahara, sense withdrawal; dharana, concentration; dhyana, meditation. Dhyana leads to savikalpa samadhi, the experience of Satchidananda, and ultimately to the experience of nirvikalpa samadhi, the realization of Parasiva.

Yoga in yoga begins with assuming a proper meditation posture, regulating the breath followed by sense withdrawal, leading over time to deeper and deeper meditative states. Verse 1444 of the *Tirumantiram* mentions one such state which is the experience of inner light: "Beholding the Light of life is great yoga worship." Sivajnana Siddhiyar gives an explanation of this process: "In sakha marga, one has to control his senses, stop his breath, fix his mind, explore the secrets of the six adharas and know their Gods.

Passing beyond into the regions of the bright chandramandala, one has to drink deeply of the amrita, filling his every pore, and dwell fixedly on the Supreme Lights. If one performs this yoga of eight kinds, his sins will fall away and he will attain the form of God Himself.”

For the yogi who meditates, darshan of the Deity is not just a transmission from an external God. It is a bright light that emanates from the innermost chamber of his sahasrara chakra. The yogi’s worship becomes totally internal as he follows that light, that darshan, seeking to discover its origin.

Jnana in yoga is the maturity of soul gained by years of following these advanced practices, the changes and transformations of character and perception that naturally take place in the depths of the soul. The yoga pada is also called the sakha marga, meaning "way of the friend," for here the soul looks upon God as an intimate comrade. The patavi, attainment, of this pada is sarupya—“likeness” to God. Sundaramurti Nayanar (Sundarar) is the Samaya Acharya who exemplifies the yoga pada.

Gurudeva taught that in the yoga pada the yogi works hard with a passion and strength he never knew he had, with a commitment he once thought unattainable, and as he works his willpower is activated. And one day, he reaches the essence of being in his first nirvikalpa samadhi—the experience of Parasiva. He explained that when the yogi comes back from this indescribable fulfillment, he brings new insight and perspective into his life. He is transformed by that experience. He can never see life in the same way again.

The maturation that takes place in the yoga pada, or raja yoga, includes stabilizing awareness in the anahata chakra. This is done with the grace of Lord Murugan. To quote Gurudeva’s explanation: “It’s the helping hand of Lord Murugan that reaches down from the anahata chakra, grabbing and lifting the devotee up.”

Gurudeva describes the yoga in the yoga pada as follows: “The yogi who is in the process of yoga, who has not graduated to God Realization, is not yet a jnani, though he has all kinds of realizations along the way, some sustained, others yet to be sustained. The yogi is seeking, striving, changing, unfolding, trying with all his heart to become, to know his ultimate

goal. When the merger has become complete, when two have become one, he is no longer a yogi, he is a jnani. When the student graduates from college, he is no longer a student, he is a graduate. The merger of which I speak is Parasiva, to be experienced by the sannyasin who has turned from the world and into himself.”

Jnana Pada

This is the fourth in our series of articles focusing on the four padas of Saiva Siddhanta: charya (conduct), kriya (worship), yoga (meditation), and jnana (enlightenment).

The jnana pada is the fourth of the four progressive stages of practice in Saiva Siddhanta. This pada focuses on meditation that regularly reaches the deepest level, known as nirvikalpa samadhi, in which the yogi realizes Parasiva—the highest and transcendent aspect of Siva. It has four stages.

Charya in jnana consists of cleaning the meditation room or portion of a room and the collection of all the necessary substances for worshipping one’s guru and Deities relating to meditation.

Kriya in jnana consists of offering a prayer, a chant or a short puja to one’s guru and the guru’s lineage after beseeching the grace of any Deities your guru has asked you to worship prior to meditation.

Yoga in jnana is to focus on daily reexperiencing the ultimate meditative state of nirvikalpa samadhi, the realization of Parasiva. It is popularly thought that it is enough to experience this state once—to achieve realization. That is not true. Parasiva must be regularly reexperienced over many years. This reexperiencing process brings this realization throughout the entirety of one’s being. As Gurudeva explains in *Merging with Siva*, Lesson 34: “Parasiva has to be experienced time after time for it to impregnate all parts of the body.... Ears, eyes, nose, throat, all parts of the body have to realize Parasiva, and the siddha has to do this consciously. The calves have to realize Parasiva. All the parts of the lower body have to

realize Parasiva, because all of those tala chakras have to come into that realization.”

Jnani in jnana is the state of arrival, of being more than doing. The difference is internal, with the jnani being always aware that it is Siva doing it all, not him. For him there is no effort in the doing and no necessity to do anything more. This blissful, uninterrupted perception is the ripe fruit of accumulated experiential knowledge gained by these practices.

The jnana pada is also called the san marga, meaning “true path,” for here God is our dearest beloved, implying transcendence of individuality and merger with the Divine. The patavi, attainment, of this pada is sayujya—“union” with God. Manikkavasagar is the Samaya Acharya who exemplifies the jnana pada.

As well as mentioning specific goals to be achieved in meditation in the jnana pada, the *Tirumantiram* states in verse 1474 states that jnana in jnana is to transcend the “I” and “Mine.” This is not referring to the basic form of detachment, which is to be detached from the fruits of one’s actions. It refers to cease identifying as a person who was born and will die. It means identifying with omnipresent, loving consciousness throughout one’s daily activities—identifying with Satchidananda, “Existence-consciousness-bliss.” This attainment is the result of repeated experiences of nirvikalpa samadhi, which result in the kundalini shakti residing coiled in the sahasrara chakra. It is a permanent state of oneness with Siva.

The following verse from the *Sarvajnanottara Agama* clearly elucidates this jnana pada practice of giving up identifying as a person and identifying instead as Śiva’s omnipresent consciousness: “‘Siva is different from me. Actually, I am different from Siva.’ The highly refined seeker should avoid such sort of vicious notion of difference. ‘He who is Siva is indeed Myself.’ Let him always contemplate this non-dual union between Siva and himself. One who is with one-pointed meditation of such non-dual unity gets himself established within his own self, always and everywhere.”

The yoga pada and the jnana pada are quite similar. Each relates to the deepest state of meditation, which is nirvikalpa samadhi. The difference

between them is that in the yoga pada, there is the initial experience of that samadhi, whereas in the jnana state, there is the frequent reexperience of that samadhi. It is this regular repetition of nirvikalpa samadhi which causes profound changes in the yogi such as living in the sayuja state.

Though the experience of Parasiva achieved in nirvikalpa samadhi cannot be described, my guru Sivaya Subramuniaswami gave us some sense of this realization in these insights: “If you visualize above you nothing; below you nothing; to the right of you nothing; to the left of you nothing; in front of you nothing; in back of you nothing; and dissolve yourself into that nothingness, that would be the best way you could explain the realization of the Self. And yet that nothingness would not be the absence of something, like the nothingness inside an empty box, which would be like a void. That nothingness is the fullness of everything: the power, the sustaining power, of the existence of what appears to be everything.”

In Saiva Siddhanta terminology, atattva, the negation of tattva, is the term used to describe the indescribable Reality—the Absolute, Parasiva, the Self God—which transcends all 36 categories (tattvas) of manifestation. It is beyond time, form and space. *Sarvajnanottara Agama* gives this description: “This self is neither inside the body nor outside the body. Neither is it at a greater distance nor at a closer point. It is in a supreme space beyond the range of 36 tattvas and of the worlds contained in them. The refined seeker should install his mind in that supreme place.”

Gurudeva taught that in the jnana pada each time the yogi enters nirvikalpa samadhi he returns to consciousness more and more the knower. His perspective of *Sivoham*, “I am Siva,” steadily deepens. Gurudeva also taught that “It is the helping hand of Siva that reaches down from the ajna chakra and lifts one up. One cannot do it alone.” In jnana, the yogi himself is now the source of light and darshan which he radiates.